

Teaching of Critical Reading Skills in ESL and EFL Context: A Proposal for Action Researchers

Jabreel Asghar

English Language Institute
King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia

Abdullah Al-Bargi

English Language Institute
King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia

Abstract:

‘How can we teach critical thinking skills to ESL/EFL learners?’ This paper answers this specific question with a proposed model of critical reading. The paper presents sample materials designed following Wallace’s (2003) three dimensional model of critical reading with linguistic, conceptual and cultural foci. The paper informs material developers and action researchers on how Wallace’s three dimensional approach to reading texts may enable readers to develop broader perspectives on various issues, and give critical insight into the texts. The sample material also demonstrates how Wallace’s three-dimensional approach to reading may help learners become critique of the outer world and allow them decode the texts in the light of their own schematic knowledge.

Keywords: Critical reading, critical thinking, functional grammar, material development, pedagogical change.

Introduction

Critical reading skills have been of vital significance in the higher education sector and are considered to be essentially acquired in academic discourse (Davidson, 1998; Connolly, 2000). Therefore, it is essential that critical reading and thinking skills should be taught in order to have them take the ownership of their learning, and form their ideologies independently in the context of their immediate experiences. In order to provide with a model of adapting material to encourage critical thinking skills, we have selected the texts from a textbook taught in Pakistani state colleges at higher secondary level. Evaluating the same textbook, Asghar (2013) asserts that conventional teaching of the texts from this textbook in question has failed to achieve the goals. Conventional reading of texts is most likely to restrict students' response to the texts. Asghar infers that such a situation reflects the teachers' unawareness of the potential of the textbook in terms of pedagogical treatment, which leads to disseminating incomplete and/or misperceived information to students, hence causing what Morgan (1997) calls false or naive consciousness. Morgan believes when students are in the state of false consciousness, teachers, through their strategies, may bring their students to the point where the students can "name their world" according to their experience of it and not according to the ideologies, institutions and discourses that declare it to be otherwise. In line with Morgan (1997) and Asghar (2013), and also following up the latter, the main objective of this qualitative research based paper is to inform teachers and material developers on how a slight, and still effective change in methodological approach may help to achieve a more qualitative and reliable comprehension of texts. In this perspective, this paper presents a cluster of newly designed and/or adapted materials to support how a critical approach in English language classroom could significantly contribute to achieving the learning goals.

Related literature

This section briefly reviews some of the main strategies that have been suggested by various scholars for teaching critical skills in English language classroom followed by a focus on the main approach we have used to design activities for critical reading training. Critical reading skills become more challenging as well as crucial for ESL and EFL learners who have to process a reading text within the conventional classroom (Davidson, 1998; Levines, Ferenz and Reves, 2000). Levines et al, therefore, emphasize that it is indispensable to develop critical literacy skills among them in order to train them reading in real life situation. Morgan (1997) also believes that at schools students are to be developed as fully conscious, rational individuals with a meta-level understanding of language and politics, and their roles as subjects. Incorporating critical literacy in curriculum could bring not only such kind of awareness, but could also develop a broader sense of tolerance towards multicultural and multi-ideological societies.

In their study on how students can be taught analysing and evaluating certain types of texts, Patching, Kameenui, Carnine, Gersten and Colvin (1983) agreed that in order to develop critical reading skills, a combination of the systematic instruction and use of workbook should be combined. By systematic instructions they mean converting cognitive processes into physical operations. For example, the teacher can explain and model the appropriate behaviours and their interrelationship and also provide precise feedback to the learners (Patching et al, 1983: 409). They also emphasized that instructions should be accompanied by independent practice for effective learning outcome. Content based instructions, which combine syllabus and teaching goals, have also been used for teaching of critical skills. In content based instructions, curriculum is more focused on the subject matter rather than the form, functions or situations (Leaver and

Stryker, 1989). The material proposed in this paper incorporates some elements of content based instructions by more considering the subject matter rather than the form or functions of the texts.

Halliday's (1990) interpretation of decoding texts at ideational, interpersonal and textual levels is another means of developing in-depth understanding of texts among readers, which has been used in the proposed material in this paper. Such a critical discourse analysis of texts allows readers to understand and decode the meaning of texts in the perspective of their immediate experience, and more helpful to form their identities in line with their own perception of the world. Fairclough (1992 a) believes that discourses embody certain ideologies. The more invisible these ideologies are, the more they are effective. Critical discourse analysis of texts enables readers to expose hidden ideologies and warns them of becoming unconscious agents of hidden agendas of texts. In this perspective critical awareness into a text is even more essential for ESL and EFL learners in order to identify the hidden agendas of writers. The proposed activities in this paper help reader to uncover hidden ideologies embedded in the texts with practical strategies in a language classroom.

Research design

The research design of this study is comprised of a model of critical reading strategies devised by Wallace (2003) which is the basis of the model proposed in this paper. In order to develop critical reading skills among learners, Wallace suggests that critical reading should aim at linguistic, conceptual/critical and cultural understanding of a text. She believes that reading texts with these foci are likely to bring not only awareness of micro-interaction among readers, writers and texts, but also macro-understanding of what it means to be a reader in the contemporary world. She refers that linguistic purpose of critical reading includes "an understanding of the nature of ideological meanings embedded in texts" through the language used. The knowledge of grammar does take place for linguistic purposes but more to "facilitate reflection on the effect of language choice". Wallace believes that the critical purpose is to enable learners to develop a cognitive as well as critical link between the text and their personal lives. The cultural purpose of critical reading is "to promote insight into cultural assumptions and practices, similarities and differences across national boundaries" (Wallace, 2003: 43). In the light of Wallace's criteria to read a text critically, we designed a group of texts to provide linguistic, conceptual and cultural insight into the texts to demonstrate how such an approach is more likely to offer a deeper level comprehension of these texts.

The Textbook

The textbook in question consists of abridged versions of 11 English/American short stories, two abridged/translated short stories from Urdu literature, one from Persian literature, and one folk tale with no reference to its origin. Each story is followed by a series of activities which includes short (one sentence answer) and detailed (100-150-words answer) comprehensions questions in addition to true/false statements, matching corresponding information and some other grammar activities. Though the book is taught in a specific educational and cultural context, the textbook is mainly comprised of texts from English literature/fiction, which are generally used in state school and colleges in Asian, Middle-Eastern and African academics. Therefore, the nature of the texts and the types of the strategies suggested in this paper are universal and can be used in any context.

The proposed sample material is based on the texts taken from the textbook, and follows Wallace's (2003) three dimensional critical pattern to explore the texts in a broader perspective

with in-depth comprehension. The activities introduced in the following sections are not to be used necessarily in any particular sequence. All of these may not be used for each and every text either. Rather certain activities might be preferred or ignored in certain cases depending on the nature and requirements of texts as well as the objectives of learning outcome for each group of learners. We have also suggested some possible answers/responses/ideas for each activity in order to reflect how they might cater to the needs and objectives devised for these learners. These are some of the possible responses likely to be received from learners at this level. There is no right or wrong answer, and a large number of other answers are possible as well.

Research methodology

There is no research methodology, a research design or participants per se that could be ascribed to this paper in a conventional way. This paper is rather a proposal for material developers and action researchers to provide them with some innovative ideas to help their learners gain insight into the reading texts. For this purpose, different texts have been selected from the textbook to indicate the multi-dimensional nature of the activities and their potential to achieve a number of goals. The steps suggested in the following activities are flexible and can always be modified to suit the situation and the needs of learners. The questions used in the proposed sample materials gained inspiration from the guidelines for critical reading published with open access at the website of *the Writing Resource Centre of Empire State College, New York*. However, it does not affect the originality of the proposed model because unlike *the Writing Resource Centre's* general guidelines for a critical reading of any text, the proposed materials in this paper generates specific questions related to the respective text in question in each case. Furthermore, the guidelines set by *the Writing Resource Centre* do not refer to Wallace's Model of critical reading, and this paper developed a new model for critical reading by synthesizing both sources with practical classroom implications.

The Proposed Materials

The following section illustrates how texts could be taught with linguistic, cultural and conceptual dimensions. Contrary to usual practice, we present, illustrate and rationalise each dimension where it is described, rather than making a global discussion at the end of the presentation of the data. Thus, each dimension of critical reading model is explained followed by the actual demonstration of how it could be used to adapt texts for a language classroom. We find this practice useful in order to facilitate the reading of this paper. A global discussion to rationalise all the dimensions presented in the following section is likely to complicate the issues. As we have mentioned earlier, these activities do not have to be used in the order they appear in this paper. There is no logical sequence among the linguistic, cultural and conceptual dimensions of each text. Therefore, it was vital to logically keep all the strands separate in discussion to keep the tasks simple for teachers to use these and similar materials in classroom. Treating these dimensions in isolation, depending on the nature of the text, learning needs and learners' language competence is more practical and effective.

Linguistic Focus

Fairclough (1992 b) asserts that systemic linguistic analysis of texts enables readers to expose power relations and disadvantageous position of the suppressed class. Analysis with linguistic focus helps readers to identify individual as well as institutional representation and to better understand the cultural content in the background of their own social context. Linguistic focus might be viewed as a complicated phenomenon because of its "technical" side. Learners as

well as teachers might find it challenging to analyse texts within the framework of Halliday’s (1985) functional grammar or any other framework for language analysis because of their unfamiliarity with the same. However, such a focus is recommended first because it does not require extensive analysis from a functional grammar viewpoint at this stage. Secondly, linguistic focus is worth considering in academic context for it offers deeper insight into texts from certain angles and hence is more likely to ensure comprehensive understanding of the texts.

Linguistic Focus on Representation

The following activity linguistically focuses on a text “*The Gift of the Magi*” by O. Henry. The discussion followed by the sample activity elaborates how linguistic focus can enhance the understanding of the text in a broader perspective. A reading with a linguistic focus brings those dimensions of the text to the surface which otherwise were obscure.

A superficial reading of the text portrays Della and Jim as loving couple with deep sense of sacrifice. However, certain elements of power relation between the two genders and attribution of typical characteristics to each gender remain hidden, and readers remain unaware how female gender has been portrayed disadvantageously unless analysed within the framework of functional grammar. For example, a glance at the table below shows that most of the adjectives for Della are related to physical beauty whereas the adjectives of Jim are more related to the personality traits. The second and the third column in Table 1 list the adjectives and the verbs attributed to two main characters i.e. Della and Jim. However, it is not an exhaustive list. The fourth column is the “Others” category that includes the words related to the respective noun in one way or the other.

Table1. Focus on readership as indicated by linguistic features (tabular model adapted from Wallace, 2003: 109).

The language used in the text			
Character	Adjectives	Verbs	Other
Della	Beautiful hair Shining hair Looked wonderfully Looked better pretty	Tried to cover A tear ran down Moved quickly Sat near the door Heard Cried, said	Hope Fear Prayers
Jim	Jim’s gold watch Jim’s quietness & value Quiet Poor Fellow Thin	Was never late Stepped in Asked Folded his arms Want felt Sat down smiled Sold said	Strange experience Anger Surprise With a family to take care of

Based on Table 1 it is reasonable to interpret that the language of this text views female more as physical object and male as someone with a personality and idiosyncrasies. The use of verbs in both cases depicts the male character stronger and more independent than the female one. The verbs used for Della are more material and verbal than those of Jim which comprise of behavioural, mental and materials verbs denoting the male character as stronger and active despite the fact that most of the text is about Della and her feelings.

It might be useful to have learners contrast the representation of the two characters at certain moments. For example, the learners can explore how each of the character is introduced by the narrator; or how each of them reacts to their losses; or how each of them reacts when they find out each other's sacrifice, or how they speculate about each other's reaction. This would give learners a manageable amount of text to compare and comprehend the text at a deeper level.

The attributes in Table 1 do not appear in juxtaposition in the text, as they appear in the table, because the purpose of the text was not to compare the gender roles. However, even if we look at Jim's and Della's attribute vertically as shown in Table 2, these phrases, in the context, give insight into the portrait as depicted through the use of these words.

Table 2. Comparison of Jim and Della's attributes/processes

Della	Jim
"She started trying to remove" – as if she is covering a mistake.	He "was never late" – never done something undesirable.
"A tear ran down" - sign of weakness	He "folded his arms" – a gesture of aggression or at least that of an ability to have self-defence in contrast to showing weakness on Della's part.
"Moved quickly" – not prepared	"Stepped in" – confident and composed
"Heard" – passive action	"Felt" – active and independent action
"Cried"	"Smiled"
"Sat near the door" – waiting for Jim	"Sat down" – to comfort himself
"Said" – more submissive/explanatory	"Asked" – interrogatory, more authoritative

Looking at the text from this angle reveals how language empowers the male character over the female gender behind the veil of love and sacrifice. Under the category of "Other" in Table 1, all the words related to Della portray her as weak and humble person, full of emotional gestures whereas those of Jim depict him as a strong person with all human expressions. Especially his trait of being "with a family to take care of it" surpasses all the words used to describe Della and she emerges as someone feeble and dependant figure. Because of her tears, her emotions and loss of her hair, which were described in more detail than Jim's watch, Della might gain sympathy of readers but the hidden ideology of the text, which puts Della at a disadvantageous position, is exposed only through the linguistic analysis.

The above analysis may lead to discussing the questions given in Table 3. These questions are likely to help readers to locate their own position and identity with reference to the text and associate their cultural knowledge and background with that of the text.

Table3. Focus on readership as indicated by linguistic features (questions adapted from

Wallace, 2003: 109).

<p>Do you think that you are the “model reader” of this text? Why? Why not?</p> <p><i>I think I am a model reader of this text because its topic is very much interesting for me – love. I think everyone in the world comes across with this sentiment and it helps to understand the nature of human relations. The language is simple and the theme is clear which makes it an easy reading.</i></p>
<p>Is this a culturally familiar text to you? Why? Why not?</p> <p><i>In a way no. Buying Christmas gifts (or Eid gifts) is not that significant in my (in this case Pakistani) culture as shown in the story. I also find it unreal of a girl’s selling hair because I can’t see this type of arrangement for money in my society. I feel this bit is totally non-Pakistani in term of culture.</i></p> <p><i>But their mutual love and affection for each other is very much familiar and I can find many examples of such loving relations around me, or opposite to such a loving relation.</i></p>

Table 3 includes only one aspect of linguistic focus. There are many others which might be used to suit the type of the text in order to uncover the hidden ideologies as well language empowerment used to advantage or disadvantage a group/individual. The framework of field, tenor, mode might be another technique to explore a text below the surface which explores representation of the participants of a text and relation between the text and the reader.

Linguistic Focus on Interaction

For linguistic focus of texts on interaction the text “*I have a Dream*” has been selected. It is one of the texts which was not appreciated much partially because of its irrelevance to the lives of the intended readers of the textbook and partially because it was viewed as a boring text by the same group of students (Asghar, 2013). The data analysis showed that such a negative response was mainly due to inappropriate perception of the text. Otherwise, potentially this text could be more related to the participants’ social, economic, political and religious circumstances. Students should scan the text to complete the following table with verbs, nouns and adjectives associated with different participants of the text. However, it should be considered that students should not be asked to conduct an exhaustive analysis because at initial stage it might be wiser not to heavily analyse the texts owing to learners’ novice skills in functional grammar. Nevertheless even without going into extensive details, the following analysis gives a reasonably realistic and useful insight into the text. Keeping in view the focus of the analysis, the leftmost and the rightmost column may be emphasized in classroom.

Table 4. Making use of the overall Halliday framework of analysis (Framework Structure borrowed from Wallace, 2003: 113)

Complete the columns below, making reference to the key text and Halliday framework for text analysis.			
Personal pronouns or ways the reader/writer or main participants are referred	Language items such as nouns which reflect writer attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who are the participants? What attributes/nouns associated with respective participants? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How is information presented What comes first

to.				
Pronoun	Attitude	Participants	Nouns	
I	Am not unmindful, Say, Have a dream, Have faith,	The speaker	Dream, difficulties, frustration, American dream	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Description of miseries of people. 2. Arousing people for action. 3. Motivating people by telling them about what they will get – the description of dream. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. All men will be equal. ii. No racial discrimination. iii. Love and peace. iv. An ideal freedom 4. The scene after the struggle is successful.
You	Have come, go back, Continue to work, struggle together, work together, jail together,	People	Trials, Jail cells, freedom, persecution, police brutality, veterans, sufferings, slums, ghettos, this nation, little children, governor, black boys and girls, white boys and girls, sisters, brothers, symphony of brotherhood	
		America	Alabama, South California, Georgia, Louisiana, Slums, ghettos, red hills, sweet land of liberty, New York, freedom, great nation, my country	
We, our	Hold these truths, hope, faith, be able to transform, will be able to speed up, free	Lord, God	Glory, Children, Almighty	

The first column in the table 4 shows the interpersonal meaning of the text. The speaker has used three pronouns i.e. *I, you and we*. With the first person singular, the speaker associates the words that reflect personal thoughts and ideas. Here, the tone is more contemplative as compared to the use of second person pronoun where the lexical choices reflect a clear tendency of action.

The words like “*go, work, struggle, continue, together*” urge to stand up and strive for what the speaker has contemplated. The use of first person plural indicates a mood reflecting consequences which, as a result of cooperation between the speaker’s thoughts and people’s actions may occur after the struggle. It seems to suggest a kind of fruit of the toil (*be able to transform, free*) as well as some guiding principles to assist in the struggle (*hold these truths, faith, hope, speed up*). This part of the activity guides how to suit the action to the use of pronoun

for effective piece of speech or writing.

The textual meaning of the text may guide on planning a speech or structuring a piece of writing. In the above table, the third column on textual meaning sheds light on the structure of the text and informs reader of the logical construction of ideas in a piece of writing. Such an exercise might be very useful to teach learners about how to make an outline of a writing task. Furthermore, this text might guide the learners about how to organise an argument, by making appropriate and powerful lexical choices to persuade readers. Following the same analytical framework for other texts can help learners to understand how to identify and structure various genres of written texts.

If the same text is critically read and analysed along with conceptual and cultural dimension, it may not only familiarise learners with the movement once run in America but it will also help to identify their own social situation and problems in their own society. It may well bring awareness that slavery is not always physical but it is mental and intellectual as well. Discrimination does not relate to race or gender but it has many other forms, many of which still need to be explored in developing scarcities.

Conceptual dimension – The Text

This type of exercise provides learners with the concrete understanding of the text, instead of abstract comprehension in their mind. It not only allows learners to think of main ideas, but also those aspects of texts they might not be able to understand otherwise. Working individually, then in pairs or small group and finally in a large class group would help learners to perceive different aspects of texts. It also trains them to find out the crux of a piece of writing and personalise it with their own experience and schematic knowledge. The learners would find connections between their existing knowledge and what they are reading. This activity also serves as a kind of running commentary and a simple analysis of the text to build on more established opinion about the text later.

Table 5 gives some possible responses based on one of the texts “The Reward” from the textbook in question. This particular text has been selected because it did not get much attention from the participants, most probably because they did not have the opportunity to relate the text to their immediate experience (Asghar, 2013). The analysis aims to refer to the potential of the text and the way inappropriate treatment of the text in the classroom failed to leave a desirable impact on the learners’ minds. The left side column of Tables 5 gives various ideas in the text that might capture the interest of learners for various reasons whereas the right side column gives some possible responses that learners might give. To keep the analysis more realistic, the responses are very brief and at times vague and/or repetitive as teachers might anticipate such responses from learners at this level. If learners find it difficult to express their ideas in L2, the use of L1 might be encouraged at such point for richer, deeper and wider variety of ideas with the learners’ originality of thought.

Table 5. Conceptual dimension of the text

Exploring various ideas in the text	Possible Responses
1. What is important for success? Opportunity or determination?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity is important. • Determination is important. • Both.

<p>2. Is it worth becoming a skating champion?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Its waste of time and resources to collect money to go to Sahara for skating. • Only in west people can afford such hobbies. • Skating is not a Pakistani sports at all.
<p>3. What is a court acrobat?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is a kind of joker. • A gymnast. • Someone belonging to lower class. • A profession which doesn't require any qualification.
<p>4. Terbut, Jorkens, Georgio...where are they from?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't know. • England? • America? • Australia? • May be from Europe?
<p>5. Georgio had to struggle not only to become an acrobat but also to create a post. Do you think it is practical in real life??</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Such ambition is fictional, not realistic. • How can one be blind by his ambition and ignore his parents' happiness?
<p>6. Struggling for 60 years to fulfil a dream requires strong determination. How would you comment?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is not practical. • It is exceptional. • It is fictional. • It doesn't make sense to spend whole life for one dream. It is not appreciable. • One cannot do so, at least never in Pakistan. It might happen only a care free society like that of America, England, Europe etc.
<p>7. What do the last two lines of the text mean?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They show that the story of Gergio was that of Jorkens' own unfulfilled dream. • It means Jorkens strongly believe in determination. • It means Jorkens doesn't believe in determination because he does not seem to have his dreams fulfilled.
<p>8. Why did Terbut not ask Jorkens the reason of his sigh?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terbut got to know that it was a story of Jorkens' unfulfilled dream. • Terbut felt pity for Jorkens.

9. Do I agree with Gergio’s concept of success?	Various responses are possible for and against the question.
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Exploring the conceptual dimension of this text could provide learners with opportunities to explore the message of the text, and consider their own ideas about success. The above activity allows learners to think independently and perceive the text in the context of their social knowledge of their immediate world and helps them to decide whether or not they agree to the author and to what extent. This activity does not force learners to accept “the moral of the story” as suggested by the editors of the textbook; rather than it invites them to negotiate the meaning as well as the route to success. Such a perspective on reading is likely to leave learners not only with a more thought-out idea of success, but also with other issues such as how to question the established norms, how to build bridges between their own understanding and that of the outer world. It also enhances their knowledge of geography and understanding of global culture by letting them identify their situations with others. This activity has also potential of clarifying their ambiguous conceptions about western/European culture as indicated above in questions 2, 3, 4 & 5.

Conceptual Dimension – Authority of the writer

This type of activity helps reader to understand the meaning between the lines and intentions of author. It also trains learners to question the authority and validity of the author by questioning and exploring the writer’s style, lexical choices and syntax structures. Such an exercise enables readers to analyse the language use and the validity as well as skills of the writer to portray things realistically.

The text “*The Angel and the Author - and Others*” is another text which was identified as an uninteresting text by the readers of the textbook (Asghar, 2013). As Table 6 reflects, reading the text critically and responding to the suggested questions could help readers to discover the hidden layers of meaning and hence making reading of the text more enjoyable with personalised interpretations.

Table 6. Conceptual dimension – the authority of writer

What does the writer think of people who give charity?
The writer humorously describes the way people give charity. He satirises them by pointing to himself how mean they are to give patty charities and expect a huge reward from the Heaven.
What things does the writer show knowledge of?
The writer seems to have good knowledge of social customs, people’s psychology and the social norms and values of his society. He is referring to details such as timely passion of charity on Christmas, giving charity miserly, charity as snobbery and doing acts in the name of charity which do not benefit the deserving people at all.
What biases or values appear to have a role in the writer's argument?
If there is bias, it is very positive bias against the shallow acts of charity. From one angle, the writer seems to criticise the religious people and their philosophy of doing good for the sake of reward. First I thought he is advocating an un-Islamic concept but on second thought it revealed that actually this is what Islam and all other religions preach – doing good deed for the sake of humanity and not for any kind of reward. The text is in the

Christian context – the Christmas – but the thought behind the text is universal.

The possible responses shown above might be criticised for being too high above the existing level of learners as compared to the possible language input used in previous tasks. However, these responses indicate two factors: first they reflect the potential of critical reading exercise, denoting how it can dig out the meaning and the message from the text; secondly, these responses serve as kind of specimen of the target level to be achieved while reading these texts. The language and syntax structure in the above example might be different and of high level because the purpose of writing these responses is not to pretend the way a learner would write but the way a learner may/is expected to feel and respond. Obviously, learners would be able to do this type of exercise and other types too, only after practising how to critique a text. They may use L1 as well if expressing in L2 is somewhat difficult for them. The purpose of critical reading is not to change the existing set up, but to offer a change with improved performance in the long run.

Conceptual dimension – Logic of the Writer's Argument

This activity is based on the text “*Overcoat*”. This text has been selected because it is one of the least popular texts among one group of readers of the textbook (Asghar, 2013). Despite the text being closely related to the immediate culture of the selected group of readers, unpopularity of the text reflects that they could not understand the text through a superficial reading which might be done in a better way through critical reading as shown below. In the following activity each, box on the left gives possible responses from different learners and the corresponding box on the right side gives the possible reason/s for thinking so. Some of the responses are based on what the participants have said in the questionnaire or in the interview. No response or reason could be called as right/wrong or final answer. Explanation of some responses is also given in Table 7.

Table 7. Conceptual dimension of the texts

What does the writer want you to believe?	What reasons/supporting evidence does the writer provide? Do they seem credible?
1. One must not show off.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The young man pretended to be rich but actually he was not.
2. The main character is rich and carefree.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> His dress. The man’s stroll on the Mall. His gestures, his interaction with others. The way he does window shopping. The way he addresses the shopkeepers. <p>All this realistically portray the man well off and carefree unless he reaches the post-mortem table.</p>
3. Materialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Characters do not have human identity, rather professional ones. The young man gets attention only because of his financial capacity.

<p>4. There are two different classes with high power relation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The working class is all submissive to the rich class – the young man. • Both classes have as much distance as distant is the young man’s pretentious and actual condition. • The young man’s refusing tonga wala by his can • His refusing taxi driver, who is of higher status than that of tonga wala, by saying “No Thank you”. • The young man’s blunt mistrust in the Pan wala.
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It could be a useful if teachers provide students with ideas if the latter is stuck. In a critical reading exercise, readers are expected to show their responses supported by logic or evidence from the text. Such a stance enables readers to think more critically and analytically in order to support their argument which never happens in a non-critical reading activity. In the above case, the reader would look for other evidences to reach a pre-decided moral. Looking at the activities of the main characters, they would naturally, or critically, lead to the question why the young man behaved so; whether it was to impress people and to show off to the world or these actions are related to some of his psychological feelings. Consequently the group discussion may well lead to more realistic, intellectual and philosophical issues of society, its responsibilities towards its members and duties of other members of a society towards each other. The second point helps learners to know how language is used to delineate characters and images. The third and fourth points give insight into the deeper understanding of depicted social set up which can be used for comparison with learners’ own perception of their surrounding and/or with other cultural set ups they come across within the texts or in real life.

Conceptual dimension – Ideology that Informs the Text

Ideology informing the text is important to understand the layers of meanings in a text. Ideologies are not always visible and cannot be captured without making conscious efforts. The following activity based on the text *God be Praised* enables learners to probe into the text by asking questions focused on various ideas within the text. This activity has somewhat similar aim to the activities as suggested for *the Angel and the Author and Others*. By looking at them one after another may show how these are two samples of material which aim to get at ideology.

Table 8. Conceptual dimension of the text

<p>What seems to be the ideology -- the system of beliefs, values, and ideas about the world--that underlies the text?</p>	
<p>What words and ideas are valued in the text or represented by the author in a positive way?</p>	<p>What are the opposites of those words/ideas?</p>
<p>1. Contentment: ‘What has He not blessed me with?’</p>	<p>desire for more; greediness; discontentment</p>
<p>2. Abdul’s helplessness and cutting down his needs than making efforts to desire for</p>	<p>To be more active to accommodate what are the needs, instead of cutting them down.</p>

more.	
3. Chaudhary's mercifulness; his sending meals to Abdul, daily.	Indifference to the people around.
4. Appreciation of struggling for better life; Shamim goes to city for better future and comes back as saviour to Abdul's miseries.	Remain stagnant and making no efforts to improve situation – like Abdul?
5. Satire on hypocrisy: Abduls' so called religious restriction on his family but having no objection on violating the same by his son in law.	To be straight forward; honest; broad minded; same standards for all.

The responses within the boxes of Table 8 might be proposed by the teacher or could be explored in a guided group discussion at the initial stage. However, the corresponding box in each case to the opposite ideas can be easily done by learners in order to analyse the ideas under a sharp contrast.

The text *“God be Praised”* has rich implication for learners' social life and contains references to certain aspect of their life. Having students aware of these aspects may well contribute to improve the plight of suppressed class as well as social values prevalent in the Pakistani society. In the interviews, the participants had rather misidentified this text as a religious story which teaches contentment and presents a picture of an “ideal Islamic couple” – Abdul and Mehr-un-Nisa more seems a result of superficial reading of the text rather than understanding the main theme of the text.

Regarding responses 1 & 2, reader may challenge the definition of contentment whether it means being passive and lethargic in life; whether striving for a better life means being greedy? Without questioning these values critically, one may mistakenly appreciate all his miseries in the name of contentment as Will of God. Likewise, Chaudhary's helpfulness (Q3: Table 8) is easily recognisable and identifiable but the more important task of identifying the indifference of major portion of society comes to the surface only when Chaudhary's attitude is contrasted. The indifferent attitude of the society towards their fellow beings might be a more significant aspect which this text may like its reader to perceive. In box 4, Shamim emerges as a contrast to Abdul, with his efforts to improve his life and hence not only raises his standards of living but also resolves Abdul's miseries to some extent. In a superficial reading Abdul always gets the focal attention. Abdul is contrasted with Shamim only when the text is read critically and the latter seems to emerge as hero, or a more useful member of society than the main character - Abdul. Abdul's weakness is also sharpened when attention is given to his hypocrisy on the issue of wedding customs. Thus as a result of reading the text critically, readers get entirely a different picture by discovering the hidden ideologies and the layers of meaning embedded in the text which a simple reading cannot offer.

Cultural dimension – Examining Your Reactions

Reflecting on own responses and reactions to a text helps “to promote insight into cultural assumptions and practices, similarities and differences across national boundaries” (Wallace, 2003: 43). This is an aspect of reading which enables reader to complete those gaps between his knowledge and the new knowledge. It may also help to develop a sense of global culture by understanding and giving space to other cultures, values and beliefs. It does not necessarily mean teaching the new culture but helping to understand it.

The following activity is based on the text “*Dark they were and Golden-eyed*”. Almost all the participants of the main research project seemed to “reject” this text because they thought that it is unrealistic and did not relate to their real life situations (Asghar, 2013). In order to create more realistic responses for the cultural analysis of this text, anticipated responses were created with a presumption that this is a boring text because it discusses a topic which is far from reality, though a popular theme with story writers. However, despite building a presumption about the text, if the text is read with critical questions suggested in Table 9, the development of thought from rejecting a text as being unrealistic to finding identification of the same “unreal” society in real life could be realised clearly.

Table 9. *Cultural dimension of the text*

<p>1. What does the author want me to believe in or agree with?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To introduce possibility of establishing colonies on other planets. To indicate scientific development
<p>2. What were my beliefs about the subject before I read this?</p> <p>I am convinced that science has made amazing development but to me living on some other planet is just a myth and I never believed in it.</p>
<p>3. What are my beliefs about it now?</p> <p>The same. I think it is just in fiction that man can live on some other planets.</p>
<p>4. What has the text convinced me of specifically?</p> <p>The earth could have been destroyed as result of nuclear war. But I doubt that people could find another planet to move to.</p>
<p>5. What do I still have doubts about?</p> <p>The same as mentioned above to questions 1, 2, 3& 4.</p>
<p>1. What questions does this text raise for me?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did they grow food on the Mars and what kind of food it was? What kind of society was that? Same as earthly one or different? How it was different? What kind of government was there? Why did they become friendly and peaceful unrealistically contrary to the history of their ancestors? How could they have forgotten their native language if they have been communicating in the same language on the new planet? If it was a new language how did they evolve it so perfectly?
<p>2. What insights do I have now that I didn't have before I read this?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What kind of a society it would be actually if all this happens in reality? How far it would be different than depicted in this story? What are the possibilities of such an incident? Why did the writer create this story? Is it just a fiction or there is some elements of truth that life exists on other planets?

- What could have made those people friendlier on the Mars rather than rivals like they were on the earth? Complete freedom? Sense of loneliness?
- Why does the writer think that the earthly people became better Martians

However, only after showing willingness to understand the depicted culture with an open mind and open eye, the text could be explored beneficially. It has been aimed to keep the anticipated responses simple in order to suit to the level of the actual learners. If learners could not follow the same development of thought, and consequently could not show development of thought in each and every case by any means, teachers might help them through brainstorming, guided group discussion and by providing students with ideas. If the same text is taught with critical dimension, including all the three linguistic, conceptual and cultural dimensions, learners are more likely to change their views about this as well as other texts by demonstrating a rich and deeper understanding of the texts.

Final word

The above discussion demonstrates that reading text with a linguistic, conceptual and cultural focus not only helps reader perceive the world in their schematic background, it also equips them with skills to become autonomous thinkers. Any text with Wallace's three dimensional perspectives can be critically explored using the questions and tables presented in this paper. Kumaravadivelu (2006: 70) asserts that critical approach to language learning is "about connecting the word with the world. It is about recognizing language as ideology, not just system. It is about extending the educational space to the social, cultural, and political dynamics of language use". In line with Kumaravadivelu, it can be asserted that reading text with a critical approach provides readers with in-depth analysis of the issues discussed in the text and help them develop critical and analytical thinking skills. Such skills eventually lead them to critically analyse the language, challenge the status quo and strive for change to benefit the affected groups and individuals. Morgan (1997) considers schools as key site for struggle. Therefore, it is logical to utilise this key stage to train learners about how to uncover the hidden ideologies which Fairclough (1992 a) believes are more effective when hidden. Such a critical approach is most likely to be useful in ESL and EFL context because it potentially enables learners to contextualise the newly acquired information within their own world of experience, and hence help them build bridges of learning between their own understanding and that of the outer world.

About the Authors:

Dr Jabreel Asghar earned his doctorate in Applied Linguistics and ELT from the University of Warwick, UK. He has previously taught in higher education sector in the United Kingdom, Pakistan and the Middle East. His major research interests include critical pedagogy, critical reading & thinking, CDA, curriculum & material development and sociolinguistics.

Dr. Abdullah Al-Bargi is Vice-Dean for Development at the English Language Institute (ELI), King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia. He has also served as an advisor to the editorial board of the Saudi Gazette Newspaper. He was recently featured in the ASU Alumni Magazine "Learn Locally, Work Globally." He also teaches linguistics courses at the European Language and Literature Department at KAU. Dr. Al-Bargi earned his Master's in TESL and PhD in Linguistics/Rhetoric & Composition from Arizona State University, USA.

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